



## **Book Review Collaborative Environmental Management: What Roles for Government?**

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No Abstract

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## Book Review

# Collaborative Environmental Management: What Roles for Government?

Kristan Cockerill

*Collaborative Environmental Management: What Roles for Government?* T. M. Koontz, T. A. Steelman, J. Carmin, K. S. Korfmacher, C. Moseley, and C. W. Thomas. 2004. RFF Press, Washington, DC. 200 pp. \$50 cloth, \$23.95 paperback.

The concepts and practices surrounding institutionalized public participation in the United States have evolved over the past six decades, resulting in increased attention toward collaboration. Koontz et al. open their book with a thorough, but succinct, review of this evolution, providing excellent context for this book's focus on the role that government plays in collaborative natural resource management. Following the introductory chapter, the authors document six case studies organized around government roles as follower, encourager, and leader in collaborative activities. This is an effective organizing principle that provides the reader with valuable insight into the direct and indirect roles that government plays in any environmental management effort. The case studies are geographically diverse and cover both land and water management projects. The cases highlighting government as follower and as leader document details of specific collaborative processes, while the two cases featuring government as an encourager place more emphasis on how to establish a collaborative process. The case studies include efforts that were largely successful, as well as those that did not achieve their goals. A summary chapter provides a solid overview, with helpful tables documenting the governmental roles of actor and institution in the case studies. The final chapter offers a thoughtful discussion about what role government might play in collaborative efforts in light of the findings from the research presented. The authors describe the limitations of the present work and provide ample ideas for future research to better understand the dynamics inherent in collaboration. They also provide citations to allow the reader to review research that is critical of the collaborative approach.

Although the preface indicates that the authors are reaching out to a multi-faceted audience (policy makers, researchers, teachers), the book maintains a distinctly “research” feel. It is well written, however, and therefore quite accessible to decision makers who are encouraged to consult this work before embarking on a collaborative effort. While clearly written, the book's structure reflects its multi-authored nature. The preface and the introduction state that key variables for the case studies are government's role in defining the issue, providing or enabling resources, establishing a group structure and decision-making process, and determining outcomes from the projects. As noted, the summary chapter provides a good overview of these aspects for each case study. The actual case study chapters, however, are not consistently structured along these lines. Each chapter has widely disparate subheads and covers the key variables to differing depths. This makes the text a bit cumbersome for use in the classroom.

An appendix gives methodological information on how data for each case study were gathered. This background is important and helpful to teachers and researchers. In the main text, however, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether a conclusion is an author's interpretation or the actual results from interviews/surveys with participants. In several places this ambiguity left me sensing a negative bias toward government participants. For example, in discussing a project that federal agencies cancelled, the authors state, “Ultimately the project did not fit well with the institutional norms of the Forest Service, which favored projects that could be done with segmented staff and budgets, emphasized routine over creativity, could show concrete, measurable progress, and could be easily supported up the chain of command.” The tone and language implies that this is author criticism rather than the official message from the Forest Service. If my reading of this passage is accurate, then it begs the question whether the Forest Service personnel would agree with this assessment of their rationale for halting the project.

The authors provide ample citations to allow readers to delve deeper into these case studies, which is beneficial because several cases left me wanting more detailed information. For example, the authors conclude that focusing on science as a way to reduce conflict precluded positive collaboration in one case. A key issue was that citizen committee recommendations for funding research projects were not heeded. As I read, I wondered whether all participants worked together to establish criteria by which proposals would be judged. Were the citizen participants trained to evaluate sound science proposals? Was the citizen committee informed as to why their proposal did not pass scientific muster? This case, in particular, piqued my interest because in my experience, having a science focus does not inherently mean collaboration will fail. It does, however, require significant attention to participant education—both for scientists and for non-scientists to learn to communicate with each other.

Minor criticisms aside, this book fills an important niche in the literature by providing insight into the roles that governmental actors and institutions play in environmental management. By covering a diverse array of projects, the authors suggest a crucial lesson, which is that collaboration is a complex process whereby numerous variables are at play in determining how effective any specific project will be. It is therefore quite beneficial to have these cases documented so that other investigators can continue to learn about collaboration as a management method.